

# **History of the 40<sup>th</sup> Tank Company, California National Guard 1924-1939**

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40TH TANK COMPANY, 40TH DIVISION (Continued)

Second Lieutenants (Continued)

Commanding Officers

<u>Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Commission</u>
Edward C. Alvitro, 2nd Lieut. (In lieu of 1st Lieut., Sept 28, 1925)	May 26, 1925	June 1, 1925
Lyman E. Johnson, 2nd Lieut. (Promoted 1st Lieut., March 18, 1931)	June 11, 1925	June 13, 1925
George W. Hunter, 2nd Lieut. <i>Included 2/10/41</i>	Jan. 26, 1926	Feb. 2, 1926
Frederick C. Moffitt, 2nd Lieut. <i>Included 2/10/41 as 1st Lt</i>	Mar. 10, 1931	Mar. 30, 1931

Activities:

The 40th Tank Company, 40th Division, California National Guard, located at Salinas, California, was organized and mustered into the State service on June 18, 1924, by Major R. W. Dusenbury of the United States Army.\* The ceremonies took place at the Elks Club, Salinas. The unit was sponsored by the Salinas Lodge of Elks, Chamber of Commerce, American Legion and other civic bodies of the city of Salinas. On the date of its organization the Company consisted of five commissioned Officers and fifty-five enlisted men.

Suitable quarters for the many tanks and other equipment were arranged and the Company immediately got under way following the capable leadership of Captain George F. Grant.\*\*

The 40th Tank Company was organized too late for the unit to attend the 1924 Annual training encampment at Camp Del Monte. The officers did attend the encampment, however, and gathered much valuable information concerning the duties of their newly acquired command. Great interest was shown in the organization by its officers and men after receiving their equipment from the Arsenal.

The motor experts led by Lieutenants Heple, King and Lacey, were in their element showing the younger men how to "do their stuff". Eight tanks were delivered to this organization, including one Radio Tank, fully equipped with receiving and transmitting apparatus. Great interest in the training was manifested by all, and Captain

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\*40th Tank Company, 40th Division, California National Guard, was organized June 18, 1924, under General Order No. 48, August 15, 1924. Adjutant General's Office.

\*\*California Guardsman March 1931, page 11.

40TH TANK COMPANY, 40TH DIVISION (Continued)

Activities (Continued)

Grant was determined that the 40th Tank Company would be prepared to take part in the annual training encampment.\*

A general annual encampment of the National Guard is necessary for military development, achievement and advancement. In camps of instruction the men are brought together in large bodies and are habituated in the varied duties of camp and field. Men are encamped in tents and are required to perform sentry duty, guard mount and dress parade; and are instructed daily in the drill. In a short time they become familiar with the routine duties of the profession of arms, and are in readiness when the exigency arrives to put into practice the teachings of the camp and garrison. Through such measures it is possible to have an army of citizen-soldier ready, even while quietly engaged in the peaceful pursuits of life, to spring to arms on short notice. The military Organization is most needed in the cities and large towns. The National Guard serves as an auxiliary force to the police, and by its presence, order is maintained and lawlessness prevented, thereby securing for the citizens their vested rights and privileges.

\* The 40th Tank Company participated in its first annual training encampment which was held at Camp Del Monte, July 4th to 18th inclusive for the year 1925. The Tank Company performed the duties assigned to it in a creditable manner and after the encampment the Company returned to its Headquarters in Salinas, more capable, better trained and nearer the point of perfection in training which the California National Guard demanded.\*\*

\* The 40th Tank Company attended the encampment with three Infantry Regiments, the 40th Signal Company, the 79th Infantry Brigade Headquarters and Headquarters Company and all members of the State Staff Corps and Departments. This gave the Tank Company opportunity for the maximum of training, making the organization more efficient in the performance of the duties assigned to it.

\* The 40th Tank Company walked away with the camp ribbon for the year 1926, for being the best company along sanitary lines.\*\*\*

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\*California Guardsman December, 1924, page 16.

\*\*California Guardsman July and August, 1925, page 5.

\*\*\*California Guardsman September, 1926, page 6.

Activities: (Continued)

The motorized Tank Company, although a new organization, walked away from the 1926 annual training encampment with the Blue Ribbon awarded to the best company along sanitary lines. Their first year at the training encampment in 1925, the Company was a close second for the same prize and at the beginning of the 1926 training period they made up their minds to walk away with the honors.

The 40th Tank Company being a special organization, it was impossible for the unit to compete for regimental honors, and they established a record when they won the Blue Ribbon for the year 1926 encampment, in view of the fact that this was their second year of attendance at the annual training encampment.\*

Owing to the fact that the training program of the unit for 1926 was somewhat broken up by the attachment of ten Reserve Officers; and that these men had never received instruction in actual tank drill and maintenance, it was necessary to devote a great deal of time to their instruction. However, the Reserve Officers were apt students and it was not long before they were putting the "iron horses" through numerous drills.\*\*

The 1926 encampment was greatly enjoyed by the men of the Tank Company and all expressed a desire to attend the 1927 training encampment and again win the coveted Blue Ribbon and also to score many points in the athletic events\*\*\*

The day when the National Guard could be called "tin soldiers" with any degree of truthfulness passed. Under strict Federal regulations, as it is today, the "militia" of another day has taken on a degree of respectability and prominence that was not possible under the old political control plan which existed prior to the passage of the National Defense Act of June 3, 1916. That plan federalized the National Guard, placed capable officers with the state troops as instructors and inspectors, and made both officers and men assume a real obligation to State and Nation. Today the Army of the United States consists of three components, viz: The Regular Army, the National Guard and the organized Reserves. Commission or warrant in one component means just as much as in another.

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- \*California Guardsman September 1926, page 6.
- \*\*California Guardsman September 1926, page 33.
- \*\*\*California Guardsman September 1926, page 33.

40TH TANK COMPANY, 40TH DIVISION (Continued)

Activities: (Continued)

The officers in command of the 40th Tank Company are just as much officers of the Regular Army as those serving in the regular component at the Presidio of Monterey. Due to the fact the term of enlistment of many enlisted men of the 40th Tank Company were expiring in 1927, it became necessary to start a recruiting campaign to build the unit up to its full strength. This was accomplished quickly and in time for the enlisted men to be mustered in for the 1927 training encampment.\*

The 40th Tank Company attended all annual training encampments since 1927, with a remarkable record for attendance at each, and has steadily progressed in Armory and Field training until it has become a valuable adjunct to the 40th Division and one of the most interesting units.\*\*

The 40th Tank Company is an important element in the defense of the state as it is one of the few mechanized units on the Pacific Coast and in its strategic location in the approximate center of population in the State of California, its availability in event of any disturbance which would require the services of an efficient motorized command is assured.\*\*\*

On Thanksgiving Day, November 24, 1927, the 40th Tank Company was called upon in an emergency to serve the interests of the citizens of the state. The inmates of Folsom State Prison attempted to inaugurate a more or less private war of their own on that date.\*\*\*\* The efficiency of the 40th Tank Company was demonstrated when the Adjutant General ordered two tanks manned and equipped to proceed at once to Folsom. Although the order came at 7: P. M., on Thanksgiving Day, the Company was mobilized, fully equipped and on its way to the scene of the riot at Folsom Prison in less than three hours from the time the order was received. Ten hours later the detachment was at the gates of Folsom Prison ready for action. Fortunately, the prisoners had capitulated at 7: A. M., that morning, thereby, terminating a two day murderous orgy within the prison walls. Mobilizing, equipping and transporting a detail of such heavy, cumbersome equipment two hundred miles in less than thirteen hours will, no doubt, stand as a record for some time to come and it demonstrated the efficiency of the 40th Tank Company.

Another demonstration of fitness for emergency duty was initiated in June, 1929, when a test mobilization was held. Upon this occasion the entire company was

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- \*California Guardsman July 1927, page 8.
- \*\*California Guardsman March 1931, page 11.
- \*\*\*California Guardsman March 1931, page 11.
- \*\*\*\*California Guardsman March 1931, page 11.

Activities: (Continued)

assembled, equipped for field service and ready to go in one hour and fifty minutes. This proficiency in any unit of the National Guard, when the emergency arises, is an asset to the State and Nation.

The character of the tanks in use by the 40th Tank Company is varied. The light tanks (six tons), tractor type, are manned by two men and have a maximum cruising speed of six miles per hour and a maximum radius of action of twenty-five miles on one refill of fuel. The tanks are completely enclosed with armor, and are armed either with the 37mm gun or the 30 calibre machine gun, mounted on a turret having a 330 degree traverse. To lessen the strain on the mechanism the light tank is transported by truck instead of by its own power, whenever circumstances permit, and part of the equipment of a tank company consists, normally, of trucks with which to move the tanks.\* By means of ramps, the tanks of a platoon can be loaded or unloaded from trucks in fifteen minutes. Manned light tanks are considered as infantry and the personnel is organized and trained for fighting purposes into platoons, companies and battalions.

The combat platoon controls five fighting tanks operated by one officer and thirteen enlisted men. Three of these tanks are armed with machine guns and the other two with 37mm guns. The combat company consists of three combat platoons and a headquarters platoon which includes a reserve section of nine additional tanks, thus giving the company a total of twenty-four tanks in all. Its war personnel consists of six officers and one hundred thirty-nine enlisted men. Tanks possess many valuable characteristics; they can turn quickly and easily, being capable of changing their course ninety degrees in two or three seconds.

Tanks can climb slopes not exceeding forty-five degrees; they can go forward over rough ground, such as shell holes, spanning all trenches not greater than six feet in width, can crush frame buildings and demolish masonry walls not over one foot in thickness, and can withstand all ordinary rifle and machine gun fire. In addition to possessing great "depressing" effect on the enemy's morale the light tank is particularly effective in destroying by fire or crushing such enemy defense arrangements as wire entanglements and machine gun nests.\*\*

The 40th Tank Company has participated in several field training problems with the 159th Infantry, with whom it has been closely associated in training.

In the year 1931, the Tank Company with the assistance of the Adjutant General of the State of California and the donation of a choice piece of property, well lo-

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\*California Guardsman March 1931, page 11.

\*\*California Guardsman March 1931, page 13.

40th TANK COMPANY, 40TH DIVISION (Continued)

Activities:

ated near the City of Salinas, erected a new modern Armory, thereby supplying the unit with new and better quarters, where they were always pleased to welcome any and all of their comrades of the California National Guard. Upon completion of the Armory, November 1, 1932, Captain Francis E. Heple, commanding the 40th Tank Company, with his assistants, moved all Federal equipment into their new quarters. Furniture and Federal property including three light tanks represented an investment of \$250,000.00. The remaining four tanks are being housed at Camp San Luis Obispo. Three light trucks, a tank-carrying truck, machine guns, "37 Millimeter" (one pounder) guns, side arms, ammunition, clothing and other items necessary to the use of such a unit were stored in the Armory.\*

The new Armory is of modernistic architectural design and one of which the 40th Tank Company can feel justly proud. Captain Heple's command consisted of four Junior officers and sixty-four enlisted men. Recruiting campaigns were practically unknown in the Tank Company. A waiting list on which appears the names of dozens of the best young men of Salinas Valley lies on the Company Commander's desk at all times.\*\* The 40th Tank Company participated in the San Francisco strike in July and August 1934, and acted as a reserve unit to the Guard during the emergency.\*\*\*

On June 18, 1934, while celebrating their 10th anniversary, the 40th Tank Company was graciously presented with the keys of the City of Salinas. After much pomp and noise in displaying the tanks of their units to the citizens of Salinas Valley, the entire company and the guests met at Santa Lucia Inn for an elaborate dinner. Captain F. E. Heple, the Company Commander, very efficiently served as toastmaster.\*\*\*\*

After the banquet the entire Company and guests adjourned to the Armory and enjoyed the Military Ball given by the enlisted men. The event was looked upon as an outstanding social success.

The efficiency and stability of the members of the 40th Tank Company were well demonstrated by the recognition of the faithful service of the officers and men by the Adjutant General of the State. Nineteen members of the Unit including Captain Heple and First Lieutenant King received highly prized medals as a reward for their one hundred per cent attendance at field training encampments. Neither of those officers missed a drill during the year 1934. The 40th Tank Company progressed steadily since 1927, and there were many other medals awarded for perfect attendance as the years passed.

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- \*California Guardsman December 1932, page 11.
- \*\*California Guardsman December 1932, page 20.
- \*\*\*California Guardsman August 1934, page 16.
- \*\*\*\*California Guardsman August 1934, page 22.

40TH TANK COMPANY, 40TH DIVISION (Continued)

Activities: (Continued)

The 40th Tank Company was deprived of the use of their Tanks from January 1, 1934, until the latter part of 1936. The tanks were "officially stored," or in other words the members of the Company were not permitted to operate the seven tanks assigned to the unit, although the tanks were all in running order. Not having the necessary rolling equipment, it was more difficult to arrange a course of instruction that would be sufficiently interesting to hold the organization together or to induce recruiting.\* In October 1936, a ray of sunshine began to show around the dark cloud of long days and months of waiting for new equipment.

Included in the organization's new equipment was the 45 Colt Automatic, three 37mm guns, and four 30 Caliber Machine guns. These machine guns are air cooled and of a special type to be used in tanks.

The ordnance department constructed a new type tank, known as the M2A2 type, to replace the old style. The new tanks now being used by the unit are propelled by a 250 horse power Aircraft Radial engine, having five speeds forward and one reverse. The speed on improved roads is thirty-six miles per hour, and fifteen to twenty-five miles per hour across country. The tanks will climb any slope on which it can get traction. The weight of each unit is 18,500 pounds with screw and armament. The armament consists of two 30 Caliber and one 50 Caliber Machine guns. The tanks are equipped with two-way Radio, and the cost of each tank without the Radio is \$26,000.00.

On April 3, 1937, the Tank Company participated for the first time in Army Day maneuvers and ceremonies at Crissy Field, Presidio of San Francisco.\*\* Major General George S. Simmonds, commanding the 9th Corps Area, was reviewing officer and Brigadier General Joseph Powell Tracy, commanding the 9th Coast Artillery District, was commanding officer. Captain Francis E. Heple, commanding the 40th Tank Company, assisted by a group of non-commissioned officers of the company demonstrated one of the new tanks. The tank driven by Captain Heple held the excited attention of the throng from the time it appeared on the field until it left the reviewing grounds after a conclusive demonstration of its value as a highly mobile instrument of attack.\*\*\*

In August 1937, the 40th Tank Company participated in the Fourth Field Army maneuvers which were divided into three areas, on account of the great distance to be traveled. The Fourth Army maneuvers were under the direction of Major General

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\*California Guardsman October 1936, page 8.

\*\*California Guardsman April, 1937, page 9.

\*\*\*California Guardsman April 1937, page 9.



40TH TANK COMPANY, 40TH DIVISION (Continued)

**Activities:**

George S. Simmonds, Commanding General of the Fourth Field Army. The activities of the 40th Division to which the Tank Company was attached and certain Coast Artillery troops, made up the units that took part in the activities in this area. The maneuvers all took place at the annual field Training Camp at San Luis Obispo.\* The entire encampment of the 40th Division of which the 40th Tank Company was part was not a State camp but was under command of the Commanding General, 40th Division, National Guard of the United States,\*\*

The training experience received by the officers and men of the Tank Company was of an incalculable value, as this was the first time the Guardsmen of California, Utah and Nevada were afforded an opportunity to take part in maneuvers of such magnitude. The arrangement afforded officers and men an opportunity to come in contact with eminently qualified officers and men of the Regular Army who could be contacted by the Guardsmen in no other way.

The 1938 Training Encampment is one long to be remembered by the Tank Company as this was the first time actual operations on the field were permitted. Over the highway on their way to San Luis Obispo roared the new tanks with full crews. On arrival at Camp, driving lessons were immediately given, and the command as a whole learned of the speed and power of the new tanks as well as the art of driving them over the various courses laid out by the instructing officers. Now that the 1938 Training Encampment is over the officers and men are looking forward to their next field training encampment in 1939, with the hope it will be bigger, better and more interesting than ever before.

The 40th Tank Company participated in the activities at the 1938 State Fair and the display of a modern tank by the Unit was one of the greatest objects of curiosity to most of the spectators. Sergeant Floyd W. Bickmore and Corporal Carl F. Abbott were in charge of the light tank on display and were ready and willing at all times to give the sightseers all the information pertaining to the tank they desired.\* The 40th Tank Company, under command of Captain Francis E. Heple, is considered one of the most valued units of the California National Guard.

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- \*California Guardsman July 1937, page 8.
- \*\*California Guardsman July 1937, page 8.
- \*\*\*California Guardsman October 1938, page 10.